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AUTHOR Frierson, Cynthia L.
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ABSTRACT

The attitudes of African American educators toward historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) were studied, focusing on the degree of support for HBCU, the perception that HBCU meet the needs of African American students, whether non-Blacks should attend HBCU, and why African Americans should choose them. The sample consisted of 30 African American educators teaching at universities and colleges. Respondents exhibited positive attitudes toward HBCU. Thirty-two percent had direct experience with a black college as a student or teacher, and 89 percent had indirect knowledge or exposure through friends or family members. The sample saw many advantages for African American students at HBCU, and all felt that they could recommend HBCU. Most (86.5 percent) supported continued integration at HBCU. Respondents did not feel that HBCU isolate students from mainstream institutions or society. (Contains 18 references.) (SLD)

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Since inception, historically black colleges and universities have stood poised as a catalyst for educational opportunity for generations of African Americans. These institutions were born of the belief that post Civil War black freedmen should become immediately educated. One hundred five institutions which were created for this purpose remain intact today.

Historically black colleges and universities were founded for African-Americans as centers for the intellectual leadership and knowledge necessary to strengthen the black community as it adjusts to new levels of competition and equality. ^Te Carnegie Commission of Higher Education (1971) defined their role as being:

* To assume leadership in outreach programs of consultation and service to the black community.

* To develop and expand programs of education and occupational retraining for black adults.

* To continue developing alternate programs to provide improved postsecondary education for students whose preparation for college falls short of requirements of conventional institutions of higher learning.

* To assume leadership in the development of techniques of overcoming handicaps of the educationally disadvantaged.

* To stimulate the interest of black youth in higher education.

* To serve as custodians for the archives of black Americans, and as centers for both the systematic study of the black man's problems and achievements, and the interpretation of his aspirations and responses to life as represented in his literature and art (p. 19).

The Civil War was the sociomilitary event that transformed Southern society and affected the educational development of blacks in profound ways. As a result of this historical point in time, African American education underwent a revolution, transforming uneducated slaves into literate human beings (Neufeldt and McGee, 1990, p. 29). It is indeed interesting that the first two black colleges were established on the eve of the Civil War. Both were sponsored by religious denominations and are still in existence today. They are Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, a Presbyterian College incorporated in 1854; and Wilberforce University, an Ohio school founded by the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1856 (Williams, 1988, p. 17). Thompson (1973, p.) reported that, "These special colleges provided the only reliable opportunity for Black youth to acquire some level of higher education".

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According to Williams (1988 p.18, 19) the majority of historically black colleges were founded after the Civil War. The details of how black public colleges evolved is indeed unusual, in that a law passed to aid white farmers and to accelerate industrial production led to the creation of Negro land-grant Colleges. In 1862, during the midst of the Civil War, Congress passed the first Land-Grant Act. It decreed that monies from the sale of public lands would be used to support at least one college that stressed the instruction of agriculture and mechanical arts. The law designated that one college could be developed within each state, and consequently, only white colleges were established. Williams (1988, p. 17) further noted the passage of the second Land-Grant Act of 1890 specifically stated that funds for higher education be distributed on a just and equitable basis. Alcorn College Lorman,Mississippi, founded in 1871, has the distinction of being the first black land-grant college in the country. Subsequently, between 1880 and 1899, 17 black land-grant colleges were established in southern and border states and emphasized agricultural, mechanical and industrial education (Williams, 1988, p. 17).

Currently, there are 105 historically black institutions of higher education. Eighty-three are located in the Southeastern United States, 10 in the Southwest, and the remainder in states outside the South (Garibaldi, 1984, p. 4). Of this total, 62 are private and 43 are state supported (NAFEO, 1994 p. 7).

The review of literature uncovered one reviewer, Fleming, who spoke to the issue of criticism of black colleges in terms of perceived inadequate qualities. Moreover, in her study on the education of black students in both historically black and white institutions, Fleming, a psychology professor, acknowledges that there was also an "intellectual crisis" in black colleges and universities (Williams, 1988 p. 29). Bowles and DeCosta (1973), however, recognized that "The never ending problems for black colleges and universities centered around the previous effects of isolation from the educational mainstream, and the fact that most of these institutions offered programs geared largely toward the restricted opportunities believed to be available to their graduates. For the most part, graduates of black colleges became teachers of black children" (p. 36).

Today, African American teachers continue to overwhelmingly indicate a willingness to teach in black colleges, as evidenced in the Rafky study (1972). Of the 87% of black scholars who would teach in a black college, almost one half mentioned service: to give the African American student the benefit of the good they received from the schools they attended (Garibaldi, 1984, p. 200). Interestingly, Rafky, (1969, p. 328) who studied black scholar attitudes toward HBCUs, found that one half of the respondents would recommend black colleges to students, and one third of this group felt that black colleges promote black consciousness and provide other social and psychological benefits.

Presently, attendance at the nation's 105 historically black colleges and universities began to rise in the late 1980's after

10 years of stable enrollments, a study from the Education Department has found. The report explains the reason for the recent increase is that a larger share of African American students have chosen to attend such institutions in the last several years. In 1990, about 258,000 students attended the 105 HBCUs. Overall, enrollment at HBCUs rose by 16 percent between 1976 and 1990, however, virtually all of the increase occurred between 1986 and 1990. This increase in black enrollment (10 percent) at HBCUs, between 1976 and 1990 did lag behind the 20 percent rise in black enrollment at other colleges. But, between 1988 and 1990, the number of black students increased by eight percent at both HBCUs and other colleges. At the same time, according to Hoffman, Snyder, and Sonnenberg (1992, p. 5), more students from other racial ethnic groups attended HBCUs and their student bodies became slightly more diverse with 81 percent being black. Fall 1993 enrollment statistics indicate that there were 284,247 students matriculated in HBCUs, with an increase of 6986 students or 2.5 percent increase over the fall 1992 count (NAFEO Inroads, 1994, p. 6).

Overall, the proportion of HBCU bachelor's degree awarded to these students dropped from 88 percent in 1976-77 to 83 percent in 1989-90, with just over 1 in 4 black men and women receiving their bachelors degrees from HBCUs (Hoffman, Snyder, Sonnenberg, 1992, p. 8,9). McClain states that, "These institutions of higher education facilitate psychological and sociological functions that cannot be duplicated by predominantly white institutions of higher education." McClain further asserted, "Black institutions are willing to accept black students where they are in terms of prior academic preparation and provide them with skills that qualify them to pursue professional careers in society" (Sutton, 1984, p.13).

On the reverse side, African American students enrolled in predominately white institutions were surveyed by the Southern Regional Education Board. Only 23 percent reported that services such as counseling and advising seemed especially sensitive to the needs of black students. Furthermore only 32 percent of minority students, overall, said their campuses had made a special effort to give them a sense of belonging (Magner, 1991, p. A2). Miller considers the attributes of black colleges to be significant. They are: a) a firm and strong sense of tradition and heritage which these institutions gained through their struggle, b) a special mission and social obligation, which are hallmarks of the black college, c) the experience of being in majority status which aids the comprehension of majority/minority status in the larger world, d) the provision of leadership experience, and e) academic support programs which are not offered at other institutions (Sutton, 1984, p. 13).

Currently black colleges are at the center of a desegregation battle. Most notable is the Mississippi case involving Mississippi Valley State University, Jackson State University and Alcorn State University. Declaring state financial deficits, the Mississippi legislature has been attempting to desegregate these universities by merger with white institutions. NAFEO, the

National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education, affirmed that, "historically black public institutions had never practiced segregation and discrimination." Moreover, they further stressed that "These institutions have a unique role in higher education, and therefore, should not be subject to any desegregation laws" (Garibaldi, 1984, p. 200). Alumni and other concerned parties have retained legal counsel in defense of the three universities.

Some historically black colleges and universities are more than 150 years old and have seen periodic enrollment shifts. According to Thomas and Hersch, current demographic trends indicate that blacks represent a younger and faster growing population than do whites. Furthermore, they will most likely be concentrated in the Sun Belt near major metropolitan areas (Levine, 1989, p. 76). Within such locations, of course, are where the majority of HBCUs are located, and where the potential for the continued growth is strong.

Sutton (1984 p. 29) asserted that continuing to engineer the trans-formation of the traditional black colleges into effective black institutions of higher learning is the most serious challenge facing black educators for the future. Literature review indicates the continuance of these black institutions will largely depend on their ability to attain fiscal stability, insure academic excellence and enhance institutional management (Williams, 1988, p. 52). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the attitudes of African American educators toward historically black colleges and universities.

Questions of The Study

1) Do the attitudes of African Americans support HBCUs?
2) Do HBCUs meet the educational needs of today's African American students?
3) Should non-blacks attend HBCUs?
4) Why should African American students attend HBCUs?

Procedures

The population/sample included thirty randomly selected African-American educators who have attained a minimum of a baccalaureate degree and hold faculty or administrative positions at universities and colleges. A self-devised 15 item questionnaire was administered to the sample in the Chicago metropolitan area. The instruments was pilot tested. The Chi Square Test was utilized at the .05 level to determine statistical significance of the responses.

Findings

The respondents indicated exhibited positive attitudes toward historically black colleges and universities. The majority (81 %) considered themselves informed or well informed on the topic. Thirty two percent had direct experience with an HBCU, either as a student or staff person, while most 89 percent had indirect knowledge or exposure through the attendance of friends or family members.

To the issues of credibility and advantages of HBCUs, 100 percent of the sample gave positive response. Furthermore, they specified the advantages within numerous areas for African American students attending HBCUs. The Black educators significantly agreed (100%) that they would recommend a historically black college or university to others. Eighty six percent felt that HBCUs effectively served students by designing challenging and appropriate curricula; 97 percent agreed that HBCUs afforded students a quality higher education. The majority of the sample (86.5%) supported continual racial integration of HBCUs in that it fosters racial understanding and mutual respect.

The open-ended responses also confirmed that American educators support historically black colleges and universities. Their responses to the advantages of African-Americans attending HBCUs included:

1. Opportunity to integrate with their own racial group for those students who have not experienced an all black setting.
2. Getting to know the African-American learning process and appreciating our uniqueness.
3. Self esteem, friendship.
4. Being the dominant group at HBCUs seems to give greater self esteem and a stronger desire to succeed for African-American students.
5. Higher expectations for African American students-socialization climate instills a sense of belonging, ownership and responsibility.
6. Students have a chance to associate and identify with positive role models to network.
7. Students develop personal pride and self esteem and a stronger sense of belonging.
8. Access to positive role models (African-Americans), such as professors, administrators, scientists and so forth.
9. The opportunity to study in a positive cultural atmosphere.
10. The opportunity to be in a setting generally perceived to more supportive of students of color. Less culture shock for many African-American students.
11. Teachers become aware of the problems of African-American students.
12. Maintenance and development of self identity; form a bonding of comradeship; and deal respectively with our own diversities.

Summary

The findings support studies by Refky (1969) and Williams (1988) who also found that black educators not only support the maintenance and the development of black colleges and universities, but integrate them. moving them into the 21st century. Nor was it found that HBUCs isolated black students from students from mainstream institutions higher education or society. Further research is needed on the attitudes of black parents of students toward HBUCs; a comparative analysis of the

experiences of black college seniors in HBCUs to those in predominantly white and integrated colleges and universities; and the credibility and quality of HBCUs as viewed by admission officers of non-HBCUs.

The intent of this study was to offer educators a viewpoint of African-American educators' perspective regarding historically black colleges and universities. This information is presented in hope that they will be encouraged to more accurately formulate their own opinions on this topic. By fostering an engagement of awareness of HBCUs through the perceptions of colleagues, both African-Americans and other ethnic groups will participate in the development of more globally-based individuals.

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